

Problem not
insurmountable

Canada and the United States have a long and generally successful history of seeking to respect each others' environmental integrity. We recognize that, for the rule of law to operate between nations, we must accept clear limitations on our domestic freedom of action. We've shown time and time again that our mechanisms of co-operation with each other are capable of dealing with very difficult specific trans-boundary environmental issues, and that we can rise above narrow vested interests affected in this or that instance in order to meet our obligations as good neighbours and as members of the world community of nation states. If the political will is there to maintain this tradition and to deal with acid rain, the means can be found.

I know there are some more expert than I who feel that a specially-financed program authorized by Congress and aimed explicitly at acid rain and its principal sources is needed to overcome this major problem and to meet the United States' obligations to Canada. The specific approach chosen by the U.S. is America's business, not mine as long as the results are acceptable to us. But I can say that we're prepared to meet our obligation towards our neighbour. And we have just recently amended our Clean Air Act by unanimous vote in both the House of Commons and the Senate to ensure we have the authority needed at the federal level to do this. We look for the same attitude from the United States in return.

U.S. Clean Air
Act review

The acid rain problem is so serious that we cannot accept further unnecessary delay. We must move now — as quickly as possible — or we're going to cause even more irreversible damage. The key challenge in the United States at the moment is to ensure that the current congressional review of the Clean Air Act recognizes the need for the United States to prevent existing and future transboundary damage. I am encouraged that the recent report to Congress of the National Commission on Air Quality recognizes the need for special action to reduce sulphur dioxide as a means of reducing acid rain.

Canada expects the United States to recognize that it must internalize the real costs of those activities, especially thermal power generation, which produces acid-causing pollutants, rather than exporting those costs across the border in the form of environmental damage to us. By any reasonable interpretation of existing international legal principles the United States cannot continue to derive significant economic benefits by exporting significant "disbenefits" to Canada, particularly when the technology exists to prevent this from happening. I am confident that the basic inequity of this situation, together with the unacceptable character of the damage inflicted by acid rain on both countries, will move both governments to act together in meeting this challenge. My hope is that that will happen soon and I am looking to many of you here to do what you can to hasten that day.

S/C